

1726

AN  
ADDRESS  
TO  
PROTESTANT DISSENTERS,  
ON THE  
ORIGIN AND INFLUENCE  
OF THE  
REGIUM DONUM.

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— O Walpole! —  
The streams of ROYAL BOUNTY, turn'd by thee,  
Refresh the dry domains of *Piety*.  
Be this thy *Courtly* smile, from censure free;  
'Twas meant for *service* when it fell on me.

YOUNG.

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L O N D O N :

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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THE following authentic account of the origin of the Regium Donum, taken, for the most part, from the London Magazine of 1774, is now reprinted in consequence of several letters on that subject, which lately appeared in one of the Morning Papers\*—the Editor has been confidently assured, that the account itself was written by a learned Doctor, of the Independent interest, *now living*; and it seems to carry with it every mark of coming from so respectable a quarter.

*London,*  
Oct. 1, 1792.

\* See the Appendix.





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A N  
A D D R E S S, &c.

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**T**H E conduct of Esau in selling his birthright has, to the dishonour of human nature, been but too closely imitated. The question—*What* PROFIT *shall this birth-right do to me?* is the language of a corrupt heart, that neither feels the value of independence, nor possesses any regard for the liberties of mankind. It is a lamentable consideration, that in all countries there have been found men destitute of the love of freedom, and ready to sacrifice at the shrine of self-interest, the dearest rights of their fellow citizens; who have not only become the pliant instruments of usurped power, but have even forged those chains which were to hold their posterity in the most abject slavery.

The conduct of those dissenting ministers who first accepted what is called the *Regium Donum*, is said to bear a strong resemblance to that of Esau. There is evidently to be seen as much servility of mind, and an equal debasement of character: but the comparison fails when we think of its effects on the interest and reputation of Protestant Dissenters. It is wonderful how so disgraceful a circumstance should have remained so long unexamined, and it can only be accounted for by supposing the great body of the Dissenters totally unacquainted with it. The design of the following pages, therefore, is to bring the subject properly before them: to describe its origin and influence; and to make the whole so generally known, that no Dissenter may plead ignorance of the fact.

The *origin* of the *Regium Donum*, was in April, 1723—Fatal æra! for then, protestant dissenting ministers first became state pensioners, and *ministerial tools*. At that time the Dissenters expected, what, for years before they had justly merited of the Brunswick

wick line—a complete restoration of all their natural rights, and religious privileges. They had often reason to complain of bishops and statesmen, for violating their agreements and promises in former reigns; but under GEORGE the wise and steady, they depended on obtaining the repeal of *every statute*, which infringed the right of private judgment, violated the liberty of conscience, and made odious distinctions between one good subject and another.

Sir Robert Walpole was then chancellor of the exchequer—a statesman, who knew too well, for the real interests of his country, the passions which are most apt to be predominant in the heart, and whom no man ever equalled in the application of gold. By this, he daily converted his enemies into friends, and so charmed even the flaming votaries of liberty, *dissenting ministers* not excepted, as to reconcile them to corruption, and even to court fetters, and rejoice in them. He had observed from year to year, the *wonderful effects* which the smiles of the treasury bench had on all ranks of  
men;

men; and finding that the Protestant Dissenters, after being years trifled with, were moving in earnest to obtain deliverance from their bondage, he closeted a few of their ministers, whom he thought to have the most influence among their brethren, and who would best answer his purposes. In their presence, he wore the mask of friendship and sanctity—he complimented them on their great abilities—assured them he had the heartiest zeal for the Protestant Dissenters and their interests—lamented the poverty and small incomes of many of their ministers through the kingdom, and that any laws should hang over their heads. The reverend gentlemen (like their successors of the present day) were soon overpowered with his condescension, eloquence, and goodness. He then declared his readiness to serve them any way, even in parliament, for the repeal of the cruel statutes against them; but the present year, 1723, “ was a *very improper time*—he, the *greatest friend* they had, would not advise them to apply that session: if they did, it would greatly injure, if not ruin the cause; but  
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the postponing it would greatly promote its success in a future period. A respectful postponing of it is very likely to obtain its success; whereas to bring it on without any regard to circumstances, or contrary to the advice of the best judges and their most able advocates, might be called rashness, and would do dishonour to the cause.”—The language of courtiers and their tools, is the same from one generation to another.

To enforce this reasoning, *he drew £.500 out of the Treasury*, by a warrant payable to a surgeon, and which was paid by another agent into the hands of *nine ministers*. The bait was, “*Pray, receive this for the use and comfort of the widows of dissenting ministers,* TILL ADMINISTRATION CAN MORE EFFECTUALLY SERVE YOUR CAUSE;” but a strict charge was given with the money, that the matter should be *kept very secret*. Grateful Sir Robert! to conceal the virtues of his royal master, and not suffer his favourites so much as to speak of this considerable taste of royal bounty, which was also promised to be annual.

Very



Very soon afterwards, the crafty statesman, finding that this money had produced just the same effects in the conversation of these dissenting clergy, as benefices, and bishoprics, always had done with respect to many ecclesiastical members of the establishment, he *doubled the pension*, and ordered that £.500 half yearly, should be paid to those nine ministers, and with larger powers, "*to be applied to ANY USES as the distributors should think proper.*" The form of the warrant was, and still is, "without being accountable to his majesty's exchequer." Accordingly, these *royal almoners*, alias *Regium Donum men*, equally divided the sum, and each person disposed of his dividend as he pleased.

Thus, a minister of state triumphed over many ministers of religion, if not over the whole dissenting interest in the kingdom! Many reverend and religious men now bowed weekly before his golden image! Walpole had but to speak, and they were *silent as to their RIGHTS*; or, as *hirelings*, they executed his orders in city and country,

try, particularly in the election of representatives. Authentic documents can be produced of the *Regium Donum* men recommending to their country brethren, *as fit representatives*, RANK TORIES (but Walpole's creatures) men, who had even *voted against the repeal of the Test Act*, in opposition to Whig candidates, who had exerted themselves in parliament to obtain it.

Some few years after, for their good services to administration, and to enable them to do more, the sum was *increased*, and advanced to £.850 half yearly: this is the present value of the treasury warrant, but there are large fees and other deductions. As there is no account required of the almoners, so the treasury knowing their care, diligence, and fidelity, leave them to fill up the vacancies occasioned by death. This makes many of their city brethren to pay them uncommon respect, and bow humbly before them, hoping in time to be nominated, and succeed to the very honourable, if not profitable, post.

We

We have now seen their conduct in 1723—they played the same part in 1732. The Dissenters at that time would have been unanimous in applying for the repeal of the *Corporation and Test Acts*—THE REPROACH OF A PROTESTANT STATE! had it not been for the arts and influence of the *royal almoners*. The pamphlets written at that time *against* the proposed application, were industriously *circulated by them*; except *The Dispute Adjusted*, a pamphlet which contended that NO TIME at all would be proper to apply to parliament for that purpose. They represented to all their friends and pensioners, *as their successors have done since*, in order to quash the application, “ That they had sufficient evidence, that the application would greatly injure the cause—that the hope of succeeding, was not sufficient to counterbalance the hazard of failing—that the great business which parliament had before it, rendered the application at that time still more improper—that it would be considered by some as a party affair—and that the dropping it would be more honourable, as well as safe.” They assured their

their brethren also, that though Walpole had declared he would *oppose the application*, and continue the acts so hostile against them they might rest confident, he was the *Dissenters firm and best friend*, and therefore wished them to put an end to the affair. Their parlour and tavern visits, their circular letters, and easy distribution of pamphlets, at *no expence to themselves*, were fatal to the cause; and the *corrupting, deceitful minister, again triumphed*—The leaders of the city Dissenters were brought to *resolve*,

“ That an application to parliament for a repeal or explanation of the Corporation and Test Acts, is not likely to be attended with success—and, that such an application is by no means adviseable.”

The ministers and deputies, who were truly independent, continued, however, to struggle for an application, year after year, from 1732 till 1736, when they prevailed so far as to have a bill brought into the House of Commons for the repeal of the above acts: but as the *royal almoners*, with

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their adherents, *openly opposed it*, Walpole pleaded the *disunion* of the Dissenters on the affair, and presently kicked it out. In one of the audiences which Sir Robert honoured the active Dissenters with at that time, he said, "*that things were not in a situation to assist them; but that administration was inclined to shew them a FAVOUR.*"—To which one of the committee indignantly replied, "*Sir, we are not come to ASK A FAVOUR; but as the best subjects of government, TO APPLY FOR JUSTICE.*" Walpole on this turned to one near him, and whispered, "*If all the dissenting ministers were like this man, we MUST have complied with their request.*"

A late respectable member of the London body of ministers\*, was so sensible of the baneful influence of the *Regium Donum*, on this occasion, and the hostile operations of the ministers who maintained this connexion with the exchequer, against the bill for the repeal of the Test Act, and against *every measure* not agreeable to the treasury bench,

\* Dr. Ch——r.

that

that the very month it was rejected, April, 1736, he made the following motions at a general meeting of the body:—

“ That the receiving of money from persons in power by dissenting ministers, and distributing it privately in charities without account, is *disapproved* by this assembly.”

“ That the *names* of those ministers might be mentioned, who received the money from the gentlemen in power.”

Notwithstanding the tendernefs of the censure—though the abilities of the mover were far superior to those of the almoners, and the *Regium Donum* had then existed but thirteen years, the receivers of it had power to quash the motions—and so great is their power, that if similar motions were *now* to be made, probably they would not suffer them to stand on record.

It will be of little moment to trace the *almoners*, and name them from Drs. C---y, E---s, H---s, Mr. T---g, &c. with their

paymaster, Dan Burgefs, fecretary to the then Princes of Wales, down to the *prefent lift*. Indeed, according to the minifterial command, this *Regium Donum* was for *many years a profound fecret*; and not till the commencement of *Lord Bute's treasury reign*, were the names of all the almoners known. Under the Walpole, Pelham, and Newcastle adminiftrations, the late Dr. St---t (an anti-pædobaptift minifter) was the oftendifible man, and ruler; his fon fucceeded him, and *now rules*.

Lord Bute thought proper, in the year 1762, to difplace the then fet of almoners, and conferred the honour on Dr. Ch---r, with an unlimited power of difpofal, and choice of affociates. This gentleman had for years constantly inveighed *againft* the *Regium Donum*, and the *receivers* of it, and had publicly moved as above, againft both thing and perfons: but *he fell*, like other brethren, *before the treasury idol*, forfook his old friends, and even employed his talents againft them in party elections, &c. &c. Such was the pernicious influence of the

*Regium*



*Regium Donum* with this great man!—and to please his courtly patron still more, he resolved to carry an address of congratulation on the late *honourable peace* from his brethren to the throne. This was accordingly moved by him, and debated with great warmth at *two* several meetings. At the last of them, it was resolved,

“ That they were ready to address his majesty on all proper occasions, to testify their loyalty to his person and government ; but as the London clergy of the establishment had not addressed on the peace, whom they usually followed on occasions of this kind, therefore, the farther consideration of the affair should be deferred, till the clergy should address.”

Very few hands, out of sixty-five persons then present, were against this resolution; and yet *three weeks after*, the body were again summoned by this *royal almoner* on the same affair, and *he carried it*. Great



were the number of converts in a few days!

To this gentleman's praise, however, be it remarked, he put the *Regium Donum* on a better footing than it had ever been—he associated with him six ministers and nine lay gentlemen; and at their first meeting they made the following standing rule:—

“ That this charity shall be extended for the relief of poor ministers, the widows of such ministers, such of their children as are excluded from the widow's fund, students for the ministry, and the building or repairing of meeting houses.”

They ordered also, that receipts should be taken by the almoners, expressing, that the money given was *charity* entrusted to their disposal, and that these receipts should be produced, and disbursements audited annually. This, it must be confessed, was a better and more public way of distribution, than had been practised by former almoners.

However,

However, on Lord Bute's withdrawing, the *old set* struggled hard to obtain again the *purse*, with which they well knew (by years experience) were connected the seat of pre-eminence, and the throne of power among their brethren. They succeeded—the Rockingham administration reinstated them, and Dr. Ch---r had the mortification to hear his plan of distribution censured, at the time he was boasting of its superiority to the other. A *noble lord* told him, "*the money was not designed to pass through LAY HANDS.*" He had found ecclesiastics to be the best tools; and a *noble duke* boasted but a few years since, when one was speaking of the strength and importance of the Dissenters, "*that it did not cost administration half so much to MANAGE THEM, as to purchase a PALTRY BOROUGH.*"

Notwithstanding the baneful tendency and effects of the *Regium Donum*, many Dissenters have contended, that still it is of great benefit to the interest, as relieving many poor ministers, with their widows and  
children,

children, repairing their places of worship, and upholding many antipædobaptist congregations in the country, which, without this *royal bounty* could not exist. But these advocates should consider, that as the money is not designed by the treasury, so it is not limited by the present almoners to such uses. But if every farthing were thus applied, what are all its advantages when weighed against the *disgrace* it fixes upon the Dissenters, as *pensioners* and *tools of every administration* ?

A few years past, a very respectable person, then in a high office, was much offended with his friend, a late eminent dissenting minister near London, for the complaints he made on behalf of his brethren, of the difficulties they laboured under in point of religious liberty ; and retorted, “ *it was well known they received A HANDSOME SUM OF MONEY from government to SILENCE their complaints as well as their applications—therefore, they should either NOBLY throw up the grant, or remain in silence.*”

The

The troubles and evils produced by the *Regium Donum* among the body of ministers themselves, is too well known. It hath been an *Achan's wedge* in their camp. It hath furnished some with means to encourage separations, and support parties and divisions in city and country. It hath enabled former almoners to appear at public collections, charity dinners, &c. &c. as very rich, or exceedingly generous, to the disparagement of their brethren. The poor country ministers have esteemed them superlatively benevolent and godlike, believing their donations to be their own property; and have been led to lightly esteem and censure other London ministers as covetous or hard-hearted, because their benefactions were not equal to those of the *Regium Donum* men. But the greatest evil is, it hath procured the almoners an influence and power both in city and country that is *dangerous*, and may be *fatal to the cause at large*.

The dissenting ministers, by their pusillanimous conduct respecting the *Regium Donum* (which, with equal propriety, hath been



been otherwise stiled *hush-money*) seem not to have considered the axiom, that a tree which has but just taken root may be removed by a single hand; but let it alone, it will strike so deep, and grow so high, that thousands cannot root it up from its foundation. The head of a spring may be stopped with a very small dam, but when suffered to take its course, encreasing to a large river, it fills the country, and an army of elephants cannot pass it. It is, therefore, high time for the London ministers either to reprobate this connection with administration, or to prove to the treasury, that the gentlemen who receive the 1700 £. annually without account, however reputable and worthy, as christians and ministers, are *not the representatives of the body*, in that or any other point.

The *famous pensioner*, Shebbeare, in one of his scurrilous pamphlets, hath made this *Regium Donum* an additional topic of abuse against the Dissenters: "No sooner (says he) was his majesty enthroned, than their teachers, either because the *annual sum* which, by his grandfather had been given  
among



among them, was *diminished*, or no longer paid, began to feel their consciences again grow tender. God, like the Diana of the Ephesians, was now once more to be served in their own way (by rebellious practices) because by that craft they had their wealth," p. 177.—Though the whole paragraph is utterly void of truth, like the rest of his libel against the friends of religious and civil liberty, yet it contributes to evince the propriety and necessity of *dropping the connection*.

If the *ministers* should not chuse to wipe off this stain which is upon them, and render what may be called the moral character of their body, *respectable*—if they should not chuse to be free, and put an end to this undue influence and sovereign power—the cause of so many evils—an *effectual* and *eternal bar to the Dissenters obtaining any of their JUST RIGHTS*, civil or religious—it is hoped that what are called the *Lay Dissenters*, who are still numerous, and respectable for understanding, fortune, and independence, will stand forth: surely, the noble cause of RELIGIOUS LIBERTY will not be forsaken

forfaken by them. One resolution of *theirs*—which is as obvious, as juſt and practicable, will annihilate the GOLDEN WEDGE—then, there will be no more ſuch folly in Iſrael, as hath been apparent ever ſince the year 1723, by means of this paltry ſtipend. The Proteſtant Diſſenters will no longer be the laughing ſtock, and dupes of courtiers; nor their miniſters the hirelings of corrupt ſtateſmen—but being animated by the ſpirit and principles of their anceſtors, they will ſay with one heart and one voice, “ *There can be no proper EQUIVALENT given us inſtead of the repeal of the TEST LAWS, and the accepting ANY THING which may carry the APPEARANCE of ſuch EQUIVALENT, either in the opinion of the GIVER or RECEIVER, muſt be of the moſt pernicious conſequence to the INTEREST and REPUTATION of PROTESTANT DISSENTERS.*”

Reſolutions of the Gentlemen of Oxon and Bucks, Lord Barrington in the Chair.  
An. 1732.

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## A P P E N D I X.

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THE three following Letters are selected from the Morning Chronicle, as having principally occasioned the present publication:—

*To the Editor of the Morning Chronicle.*

SIR,

HAVING observed in your paper some letters addressed to the Dissenters on the subject of the *Regium Donum*, I was induced to enquire of an intelligent person belonging to that body, how far the facts stated in those letters were true.

Considering the Dissenters as entitled to the repeal of the Test Laws, I had always set my face against the persecuting principles of our High Church Party: But when I learned that some of the heads of the Dissenters had formerly *bartered away their*  
C *rights*

*rights* for the annual donation of the paltry sum of £. 1700, and that their descendants still *continue to receive those wages of iniquity*, I began to think that it was becoming the public virtue of that body either to *give up* the Regium Donum, or *for ever to remain silent respecting the repeal*.

I am told, that the great body of the Dissenters *know nothing* of the Regium Donum; that to most of their London Ministers, it is *a profound mystery*; and that Dr. St---t, with two or three others, dispose of it, and *account only to themselves* for the distribution. If this be the case, I think Dr. St---t and his colleagues, ought not to *shelter themselves in silence*: they have frequently been adverted to, and a regard to their own characters demands that they should give the particulars of this matter to the public. Many moderate churchmen are, like myself, friendly to the repeal of the Test Laws; but can the Dissenters expect our future support if they persist in receiving so paltry a sum as *an equivalent for the surrender of their civil rights*?

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An ingenious correspondent has, in this day's paper, given a different account of the origin of the *Regium Donum*: He says that Walpole gave it the Dissenters for the express purpose of *creating a fund*, that should, in time, be sufficient to purchase the consent of the bishops, and a majority of the legislature, to the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts. If this were, indeed, the fact, the money may have been accumulating to this day, and those who receive it do right in keeping it to themselves. But I am inclined to doubt the truth of it, as not being consistent with those maxims by which that statesman governed himself. That *every man has his price*, he frequently insisted; but the plan for buying up the bishops and the parliament, was much too remote to answer his interested views. It seems pretty evident, considering the character of Walpole, that the *Regium Donum* was designed to reconcile the Dissenters to their present degraded state in society. Certainly every application for relief, *while they receive the price of their freedom*, is as unreasonable, as it is unjust.

In the London Magazine, 1775, p. 346, there is the following note:---“ *A curious history of the Dissenters Regium Donum, and its baneful influence and effects, was published in our Magazine for last November.*”---If any of your readers have the London Magazine for November, 1774, I hope they will favour the public with a sight of this *curious history*. I, for one, should be particularly obliged.

I cannot conclude without calling upon Dr. St---t, Dr. R---s, and the other gentlemen who have the disposal of this money, to come forward and set the public right respecting the *origin*, and the *application* of it: and at the same time declaring, that *it seriously becomes* THE WHOLE BODY *to give up for ever all claim to it*, as they value their characters as friends to liberty, and their consistency as Dissenters.

AN ENQUIRER.

Sept. 12, 1792.

To

To C. S.

SIR,

I LOSE no time in acknowledging myself highly indebted to you for the publication, in this day's paper, of the very *curious history of the Regium Donum*. I perceive, that my conjecture respecting the purposes for which it was given, was properly founded; and that whatever degradation the Dissenters now sustain as citizens, must be charged to the account of their despicable ancestors, who *meanly*, and I will add, *wickedly* bartered their civil rights for a contemptible bribe.

If such was the treachery of those men, is it not equally in the conduct of their descendants? What must we think of their shameless audacity, who, while they continue to receive this bribe, *presume to solicit the repeal of the Test Laws*? Can any thing be more clear, than the *bargain* originally entered into? Is it consistent with the rules of honourable dealing, that men should pocket the purchase-money, and

attempt to withhold the article purchased? It is plain *the Dissenters have been SOLD TO THE STATE, and themselves have ratified the bargain near SEVENTY TIMES*: surely then, there can be neither common sense nor common honesty, in their persisting to claim a repeal.

I am greatly surpris'd that the *delegates*, appointed by the Dissenters to superintend their civil concerns, have never taken this matter up. Their silent acquiescence in this shameful business would justify the suspicion, that they are under the *immediate influence* of the *Regium Donum* men, and partakers of their guilt. However this may be, my duty, as a member of the established church, will lead me to oppose, as far as I can, any attempt to procure a repeal, till they have the honesty to disavow so *corrupt a connexion*; and till *the whole body of the Dissenters reject*, as becomes them, so *BASE, so SCANDALOUS, and so WICKED A COMPROMISE*. They certainly have it in their power to call Doctors St---t, R---s, &c. to an account; and they ought, in justice  
to



to their own characters, to *oblige* those *Regium Donum* men for ever to relinquish it.

AN ENQUIRER.

Sept. 18, 1792.

To this letter the judicious Editor of the Morning Chronicle added the following remarks:—

\* \* The circumstance of the *Regium Donum*, seems to have been almost utterly unknown to the public, before the late discussion of the subject in the Morning Chronicle. It must have been unknown to the zealous defenders of the church, who could not have omitted so advantageous an argument, as that the Dissenters had *accepted a pecuniary compensation for their civil liberties, and bartered away the birthright of their posterity for ever*. Neither do the Dissenters, in general, seem to have been aware of the compromise. Our correspondent is undoubtedly in the right, when he says, that till the Dissenters *reject* this compromise, *they ought not to expect a repeal of the Test Laws.*

*Laws.* We make no question, that the Dissenters will be ready to relinquish so pitiful a consideration with just disdain.

E D.

*To the Editor of the Morning Chronicle.*

SIR,

I AM indebted to several of your late correspondents, and especially C. S. for throwing some light on that very obscure subject, the "*Regium Donum*," and as I agree with "An Enquirer," in your paper of this day, that the whole body of the Protestant Dissenters ought, by some public act, to disavow a transaction so unworthy, *which must have been either a bribe for silence, or a compromise for justice*, I shall take the first opportunity to introduce the subject before the *deputies* and *delegates* appointed to obtain the repeal of the Test Laws.

Perhaps *the Enquirer* may not know, that the general body of deputies for the civil concerns of Dissenters, are chosen only by  
the

the principal congregations in and about London.—From this body a committee is appointed to meet in London, with the delegates from the Dissenters in the different counties of England and Wales; in the latter capacity I have the honour to represent the Dissenters of a neighbouring county, who, I am sure, would be ashamed to derive, through the medium of the government, any advantages, but the attainment and security of their rights as citizens; and I cannot serve them to my own satisfaction, without promoting an enquiry into a business, which, on an expression of the will of the Dissenters, will surely be given up, or else most justly regarded as a private transaction between the treasury and its reverend almoners. The names mentioned on this occasion are truly respectable. How these gentlemen can accept a trust, for the *due execution* of which they have *no apparent means of accounting*—or how Dissenters can submit to be the *servants of a court*, that NEGLECTS and OPPRESSES them, is not for me to determine.

By

By a silent acquiescence, we have appeared to "approve the deeds of our fathers," and the severity with which *the Enquirer* entails upon us their guilt, are but "the faithful wounds of a friend,"---for I please myself with supposing, that through the channel of your informing paper, I correspond with a churchman of the rare, but valuable *Hoadleyan* race.

J. T. R.

Sept. 20, 1792.

*F I N I S.*



